

THE PLIGHT OF THE ARABS.



A typical Arab refugee family, one of many who were ejected from their land and left to starve so that Israel could be formed.

Plunder in the Holy Land

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owning approximately 6% of Palestine, but occupying and claiming retention of 80% of the total area. They now occupy many Arab cities, tens of thousands of Arab homes and thousands of Arab villages with their farms and extensive citrus fruits and olive groves.

The entire Israel population lives on Arab-owned land. Arab citrus and olive groves which were taken over by the Israeli government, account for the largest percentage of the government's income from foreign exports, totalling \$170,000,000 annually.

Let us overlook for a minute the basic injustice of the UN "recommendation." Let us focus our attention on the areas, cities and villages allocated to the Arabs by the U.N.'s "recommendation" but seized and occupied by the Israelis in 1948 beyond the "recommendation" assigned to them. Here, we observe two basic facts of major importance. These two facts are not sufficiently known or appreciated. If they were, they would guide those concerned towards redress of a gross injustice and a substantial solution of the tragic plight of Arab refugees.

The first fact that must be considered is the ownership of such areas now occupied by Israel beyond the limits and boundaries assigned to them. The following table gives this information:

Western Galilee, Arabs 87 per cent, Jews 3 per cent, Others 10 per cent; Jerusalem Area, Arabs 99 per cent, Jews 1 per cent; Ramleh and Lydda Areas, Arabs 77 per cent, Jews 14 per cent, Others 9 per cent; Hebron Area, Arabs 96 per cent, Jews 1 per cent, Others 3 per cent.

The figures just quoted are taken from Appendix 5 to the Report of the Second Committee on Palestine, submitted to the General Assembly in 1947 (Document A/AC-14-32 of 11 Nov. 1947) and are based on official figures and records of ownership of land.

The second fact concerns the number of Arabs dispossessed and displaced by Jewish occupation of those areas. The number of people who have become refugees as a result of the seizure by the Jews of Western Galilee, the Jerusalem area, the Ramleh, Lydda and Hebron areas, including the cities of Jaffa and Acre, exceeds half a million.

It can, therefore, be easily seen that if the United Nations instituted at least one evacuation by Israel of the areas that it seized beyond the boundaries "recommended" by United Nations, more than half of the present number of Arab refugees would be able to return to their lands and their homes.

It is distressing that neither the U.N. nor the Great Powers — whose interests are related to stability in the Middle East — have made it their policy that Israel should evacuate the area it has seized in Palestine in violation of the UN "recommendations." It is a recognized principle of international law developed after World War I, not to recognize title by conquest. It has even been specifically stated in 1948, by the Chief Delegate of the

United States to the U.N., that his country will not recognize the title of Israel to lands occupied by Zionists beyond the area in the United Nations "recommendations."

The value of principles, however, depends upon their enforcement. The principle of non-recognition of conquest or seizure was enforced in Korea and other places — but it has remained a dead letter in Palestine.

The value of Arab properties now seized by the Israelis is tremendous. Although no proper estimate has ever been made of such value, the figure runs between 15 and 16 billion dollars.

In 1950 the U.N. Conciliation Commission for Palestine set up a Committee of experts to evaluate Arab properties in Israel. This Committee, disregarding market prices and established values, proceeded to evaluate Arab agricultural lands and urban properties on the basis of their national tax value as it stood in the tax books as of the year 1947. Instead of attempting to ascertain what the value was, it laid down an arbitrary figure — naturally, in favor of Israel.

By this arbitrary method, the Committee arrived at the ridiculous figure of 100 million sterling, a sum which represents about two and one half per cent of the real market value of Arab properties in Israel. The figure suggested by this Committee is equivalent to confiscation rather than compensation.

When one recalls that the Jews had, before the end of the Mandate, spent several times that amount in order to acquire less than 6% of the land of Palestine, one clearly realizes that the figure suggested is quite unreasonable as being the value of the remainder of the area, with the addition of a few Arab cities like Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Lydda, Ramleh, and Safad, and a few thousand villages and thousands of orange, olive and fruit groves. It goes without saying that this incongruous evaluation was rejected by the Arabs.

At present, many persons, unaware or unconscious of the magnitude of Arab assets in Palestine, talk of compensation. Even if the principle of compensation were to be acceptable to Arab refugees — a fact which Arabs do not concede, because the Arabs prefer to recover their homes and lands rather than be compensated — the compensation, if it is to be adequate and commensurate with the value of such properties, is clearly beyond the financial means of Israel.

In any event, the question of compensation in respect of Arab properties cannot be considered in relation to Arab properties in Jerusalem (which is subject to internationalization) or to areas of Palestine occupied by Israel beyond the boundaries of the U.N. resolution on partition. Any discussion as to compensation in such areas is an indirect attempt to attribute to Israel title to territories held by it in contravention and in contemptuous defiance of resolutions of this international assembly. The question of compensation should, therefore, be so circumscribed.

Moreover, compensation can only be discussed when the Arab refugees are allowed to exercise the right, recognized in principle by the U.N. but denied in practice by Israel,

of returning to their homes. Only in the case of such refugees as declined to exercise the right to return would the question of compensation arise.

Arab properties are at present vested in the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Properties. Absentee means Palestinian Arabs, and includes subjects or residents of Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq or Yemen. The Custodian leases and administers Arab properties; he may even, in certain cases, sell or transfer the right of ownership thereto. The produce of vested properties is itself vested in the Custodian. Such produce is charged with taxes, rates, administration expenses and repairs.

Such is the picture in relation to real property. The question of movables is somewhat different. It is well known that by reason of the sudden aggravation of events in 1948, most of the refugees left their homes, shops and businesses without being able to take any of their effects or belongings with them. Some 200,000 Arab homes were looted by Israel and Israelis. Some of those homes were rich, full of silver, carpets and furs; many were modest, many more were poor.

The fact, however, remains that an organized and general pillage of Arab homes occurred which left no traces of the effects and belongings of over 900,000 Arabs. The same story may be told of the contents of thousands of Arab stores, shops and offices. Some goods were seized by the Israeli authorities but the larger part was allowed to be pillaged.

The United Nations, by its misguided decision to partition Palestine, is largely responsible for the present political mess in the Middle East and the tragic problem of refugees. What has it done to remedy the situation? True, as principal contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, it is providing Arab refugees the barest means of existence at a rate of less than 7¢ a day for food. That, however, is equivalent to feeding a patient who is still on the operating table merely to keep him alive. The wounds are not sutured, the poison is still circulating in the body; the surgeon is distracted and talks to his assistants about other irrelevant matters, such as river diversion and water distribution which, when overheard by the patient in his moments of consciousness, merely worsen his physical and moral condition.

The General Assembly of the United Nations, on Dec. 11, 1948, passed 18 resolutions recommending the following measures:

1. That refugees be permitted to return to their homeland.
2. That compensation be paid in respect of the properties of those that do not wish to return.
3. That compensation be paid in respect of damages and losses relating to property, which is recoverable in accordance with principles of international law, equity and justice from the governments or authorities concerned.

What has happened since passing those resolutions? NOTHING! Not one refugee was permitted to return and not one dollar was paid as compensation. Israel is not disposed to permit Arab refugees to return to their homes or to pay them compensation.

The United Nations also passed another resolution. It recommended in 1949 in its Paris session that the Conciliation Commission should take all conservatory measures for the protection and preservation of the rights, interests and properties of Arab refugees. What has been done in this respect? NOTHING!

Israel has however, been doing a lot. It has destroyed some two hundred villages (including their churches and mosques) and wiped them completely from the surface of the earth (see the names of those villages listed in a Christian-Arab church magazine Al-Rabita, Nov. 1953, published in Israel by the Catholic Melkite Patriarchate). It has uprooted thousands of acres of Arab orange groves.

It is actively and gradually confiscating Arab properties. This is how it is done. In

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